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Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits

Possible modalities of a review by the Economic and Social Council in 2000 of progress within the United Nations system in promoting an integrated and coordinated implementation of major United Nations conferences and summits

Report of the Secretary-General

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
	Introduction	1–4	2
I.	Review by the Economic and Social Council of progress on common and cross-cutting themes emerging from conferences, including coordination within the United Nations system	5–8	2
II.	Proposed modalities for the review	9–16	3
	A. Possible modalities for convening the review	9–12	3
	B. Contribution of civil society	13	3
	C. Possible role of the functional and regional commissions	14	4
	D. Other aspects	15–16	4
III.	Conclusion	17–18	4

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1998/44 of 31 July 1998, agreed to consider conducting in the year 2000, as a possible contribution to the Millennium Assembly, without prejudice to the discussion of this issue by the General Assembly, a review by the Council of progress made within the United Nations system in the promotion of integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields. It requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Council at its substantive session of 1999 on possible modalities of such a review.

2. In 1995, at a major debate on the coordinated follow-up and implementation of the major United Nations conferences of the 1990s, the Economic and Social Council emphasized that each conference had its thematic unity and that the conferences should be viewed as interlinked and contributing to an integrated framework of and a global partnership for development.[1] Since then, the Council has made it one of its main tasks to promote an integrated and coordinated follow-up to the outcomes of these conferences in particular within the United Nations system. It has provided yearly guidance on themes common to all conferences at its coordination, high-level and operational activities segments, and devoted special sessions or meetings to the coordinated follow-up to conferences in May 1998 and May 1999. In 2000, five years will have passed since the Council undertook this major endeavour, and the five-year reviews of several major conferences will have been completed. It would be important that the Council reflect on this effort, take stock of progress made and give guidance for future years, including for the lead-up to the 10-year reviews of conferences.

3. Such an overall review by the Economic and Social Council could also contribute to the Millennium Assembly. It may be recalled that the General Assembly, in resolution 53/202 of 17 December 1998, decided to designate the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly "The Millennium Assembly of the United Nations", and to convene, as an integral part of the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations, a Millennium Summit of the United Nations for a limited number of days on dates to be decided by the General Assembly at its resumed fifty-third session. The intergovernmental process on the thematic contents and timing of the Millennium Assembly is ongoing, in particular through informal consultations of the plenary meeting of the General Assembly.[2] In preparation for the Millennium Assembly, a series of Regional Hearings are being held between May 1999 and September 1999[3] and civil society organizations are planning to hold a Millennium Forum in May 2000 on "The United Nations for the Twenty-first Century". The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) is also conducting a dialogue, initiated at a retreat in April 1999, on the main challenges facing the United Nations system in the next decade and the responses of the system.

4. Section I outlines the proposal of the Secretariat regarding the scope and contents of the review of the Council, and section II describes possible modalities for this review.

I. Review by the Economic and Social Council of progress on common and cross-cutting themes emerging from conferences, including coordination within the United Nations system

5. In view of the role of the Economic and Social Council in integrating and coordinating the follow-up to global conferences, it is proposed that the Council, in 2000, conduct an overall review of progress on common and cross-cutting themes emerging from conferences.[4] The Council could examine progress achieved with regard to a number of broad goals that cut across all United Nations conferences. It may be recalled that in 1995, the Secretary-General identified four such broad cross-cutting goals relating to (a) the enabling environment; (b) basic social services for all: primary health care, nutrition, education, safe water and sanitation, population and shelter; (c) access to sustainable livelihoods, full employment and family incomes; and (d) environment and natural resources.[5] In its agreed conclusions 1995/1, the Council agreed to review cross-cutting themes common to conferences at its coordination segment each year, taking the themes identified by the Secretary-General into account.[6]

6. The Economic and Social Council could review progress in achieving these four broad cross-cutting goals, taking into account the gender dimension and the impact on Africa and countries in special categories. To do so, the Council could draw from the work conducted for the five-year reviews of the conferences[7] and additional preparatory work. To make it more feasible for the Council to address these cross-cutting themes, the key common goals and commitment undertaken under the four major broad topics could be extracted, and the Council could then review these in an overall context.

7. One aspect of this review would be to examine the extent to which the United Nations system's efforts to promote a coherent, coordinated and integrate approach to the implementation and follow-up to conferences have worked and to consider the steps that can be taken to achieve further improvements. Drawing extensively from the preparatory work and outcomes of the five-year reviews of conferences, the Economic and Social Council could, in particular, review how far the United Nations system has progressed in implementing the guidance of the Council on conference follow-up (in particular its agreed conclusions 1995/1 on the coordinated follow-up by the United Nations system and implementation of the results of the major international conferences organized by the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields, and its subsequent resolutions and decisions on that topic). The Council could thus guide further efforts by the United Nations system to integrate and coordinate its activities related to conferences and to address the major challenges that will affect the achievement of conference goals in the coming years.

8. Beyond this, the Economic and Social Council would conduct an overall review of how countries and the international community at large have pursued an integrated approach to implementing the goals emanating from global conferences. This would be consistent with the role that the Council has played since 1995 in examining cross-cutting conference themes. Indeed, pursuant to its decision in 1995, the Council has made a major contribution to the follow-up to conferences by reviewing themes common to major conferences and summits. It conducted such reviews, at its coordination segments (on poverty eradication, gender mainstreaming, African development and human rights) as well as at its high-level segments (on fostering an enabling environment for development; market access; and the role of employment and work in poverty eradication: the empowerment and advancement of women).

II. Proposed modalities for the review

A. Possible modalities for convening the review

9. It is proposed that the Economic and Social Council conduct its review during its substantive session of 2000, in July 2000. The review would thus be completed in time for the Millennium Assembly, and benefit from the outcomes of the reviews of the Fourth World Conference on Women (special session of the General Assembly, 5–9 June 2000) and of the World Summit for Social Development (special session of the General Assembly, Geneva, 26–30 June 2000).

10. The review of the Economic and Social Council could be held either at its high-level segment (option 1) or at its coordination segment (option 2). Regardless of the option chosen by the Council, panels could be held from January through May 2000 to examine selected cross-cutting themes, for which early consultations and preparation would be important.

Option 1

11. An overall review of progress on cross-cutting conference themes could most suitably be conducted at the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in 2000. The one-day policy dialogue with the heads of financial and trade institutions could thus contribute to the review. The outcome, which would be in the form of agreed conclusions of a ministerial declaration, would also be an important input to the Millennium Assembly.

Option 2

12. Alternatively, the Economic and Social Council could devote its coordination segment of July 2000 to this review. Consistent with the function of this segment to review the coordination of the United Nations system's activities in relation to conferences in particular, this would increase the focus of the review of United Nations system activities. In that case, the Council's review could also include Hearings with members of the ACC. Panels of executive heads of United Nations system organizations could be held with the Council to discuss how the system has integrated its efforts to support conference implementation and follow-up. The outcome of the review would be in the form of agreed conclusions, which could also contribute to the preparations for the Millennium Assembly.

B. Contribution of civil society

13. The council could encourage the holding of a separate meeting or forum of civil society in advance of the session of the Economic and Social Council, to make a substantive input into the review. The Council, once it decides on the scope of its review, could invite non-governmental organizations to make proposals on how they can best contribute to it.

C. Possible role of the functional and regional commissions

14. The Economic and Social Council could consider inviting the functional and regional commissions to contribute to its examination, by holding a debate on the review and conveying its outcome through a Chairman's summary.

D. Other aspects

Documentation

15. The Secretary-General would prepare a report to support the review of the Economic and Social Council, in collaboration with the United Nations system organizations. ACC and its subsidiary machinery could be invited to contribute to the report. It may be noted that the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) has started to undertake work on reviewing the system's efforts at coordination of conference follow-up at the country level.

Financing preparations and participation

16. Consideration could be given to creating a trust fund to help to finance preparatory panels and events as proposed above, as well as to support the participation of developing countries. This would be important to ensure the representation of officials from the relevant ministries in developing countries.

III. Conclusion

17. Given that the Economic and Social Council has undertaken reviews of specific cross-cutting themes over the past five years, it would appear timely for the Council to undertake, at its high-level segment in the year 2000, an overall review of progress on common and cross-cutting themes emerging from conferences. Since 1995, the Council has made considerable progress in effectively guiding and coordinating system-wide efforts related to conference goals. There is now a solid basis and effective avenues for better integrating efforts in these areas at national, regional, headquarters and intergovernmental levels. The Council can continue to build on these achievements at its regular sessions. It would now appear most timely for the Council to review effective progress with respect to major themes common to all conferences. This would enable the Council to move to an increasingly substantive phase of its effort to integrate the implementation of major conferences and summits within the United Nations system.

18. It would be important that the Economic and Social Council, at the start of the new millennium, carry out a broad-ranging review of conference implementation and that it thus make a special contribution to the Millennium Assembly. The Council is therefore invited to consider the undertaking of such a review in the year 2000 and to decide on the scope and content of the review and the modalities for concluding it.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 3* (A/50/3/Rev.1), chap. III, para. 22, agreed conclusions 1995/1, second paragraph.

[2] It may be noted that, based on consultations held thus far, the Secretary-General has proposed the following as the overall theme and the sub-topics of the Millennium Summit:

Overall theme: The United Nations in the twenty-first century.

Subtopics:
(a) Peace and security including disarmament;
(b) Development, including poverty eradication;
(c) Human rights;
(d) Strengthening the United Nations.

(See the report of the Secretary-General on the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations: thematic framework for the Millennium Summit (A/53/948), dated 10 May 1999. See also the note by the Secretariat on the Millennium Assembly and Millennium Summit of the United Nations (A/53/CRP.1)).

[3] The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Hearings took place on 23 and 24 May 1999. Other Hearings are scheduled to take place at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (24 and 25 June 1999) and at the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) (7 and 8 July 1999, in Geneva). Hearings will also be held from August to September 1999 in the regions of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

[4] The same proposal was put forward in the 1998 report of the Secretary-General on the integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of major United Nations conferences and summits (E/1998/19).

[5] These broad categories could be broken down into more specific cross-cutting themes, as follows:

(a) The enabling environment:

(i) A stable macroeconomic policy framework conducive to development;

(ii) External debt and finance for development;

(iii) International trade and commodities;

(iv) Science and technology;

(v) Participation, democracy, human rights, accountability and partnership with major groups and non-governmental organizations;

(vi) Promoting social integration;

(b) Basic social services for all: primary health care, nutrition, education, safe water and sanitation, population and shelter;

(c) Access to sustainable livelihoods, full employment and family incomes:

(i) Eradication of poverty and hunger;

(ii) Access to productive occupational opportunities, full employment and family incomes;

(d) Environment and natural resources.

It was also noted that a number of issues, such as gender equality, equity and empowerment of women, poverty eradication, participation and human rights, and the problems of Africa and special categories of countries cut across all the themes. (See report of the Secretary-General on the coordinated follow-up to major international conferences in the economic, social and related fields (E/1995/86), para. 57.

[6] The Economic and Social Council, in its agreed conclusions 1995/1, also envisioned contributing to an overall review of the implementation of the programme of action of a United Nations conference at its coordination segment.

[7] Review dates: review of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was carried out in 1997, and of the World Conference on Human Rights in 1998; the review of the International Conference on Population and Development will be carried out in 1999. Reviews of the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women are to be carried out in June 2000.